

North Chicago, IL - During a ceremony held today in North Chicago, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) was joined by Frank Sublett, age 85, of Glencoe who is one of two survivors of the "Golden Thirteen," to announce federal backing for a World War II memorial to be built in North Chicago by Black World War II Navy Veterans. The monument also marks a historic moment in naval history. In March 1944, the U.S. Navy commissioned its first 13 African-American officers. The twelve commissioned officers, and a warrant officer who received his rank at the same time, became known as the "Golden Thirteen".

"The monument will recognize the contribution of all members of the Greatest Generation but is unique as the first in the USA to be built by black World War II navy veterans," said Congressman Kirk addressing an audience of community leaders and dozens of World War II veterans. "We are uniquely honored to be joined by Frank Sublett -- a pioneer who was one of the first African-Americans to be commissioned in the U.S. Navy. He paved the way for military leaders like General Colin Powell who later commanded the entire U.S. armed forces. It is also important that this memorial be built in North Chicago. It will be one of the first things that young Americans who join the United States Navy will see before training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and joining the fleet."

Congressman Kirk secured a \$97,000 federal appropriation to erect the memorial in North Chicago's Veterans Memorial Park. Joining Kirk and Sublett -- who served in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1945 and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (Junior Grade) -- for the ceremonial announcement were North Chicago's Mayor, Leon Rockingham, and Captain Kathryn M. Hobbs, Commanding Officer, Naval Station, Great Lakes.

"Members of the Golden Thirteen became naval leaders long before President Truman desegregated the military," said Congressman Kirk. "At the time, they were offered no graduation and little thanks for their service to the nation. This memorial will be built just in time for many aging African-American veterans to receive a formal thank you for volunteering to save America from the Nazis and Japanese Empire."

The memorial, designed by Sutter Architects, is scheduled for completion in 2006. Although the monument honors all World War II veterans, it will have special plaques marking the service of the Golden 13 and other prominent African-American military heroes. North Chicago Veterans Memorial Park is dedicated to all who served during World War II.

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